

# Concept of Sins in Islam (part 1 of 3)

**Description:** These lessons will introduce the reader to sins, their types, severity, how forgiveness is attained for them, and how they will affect a person in the life to come.

By Imam Mufti (© 2013 NewMuslims.com)

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## Objectives:

- To learn the definition of sin and disbelief.
- To learn the types of sins.
- To learn some examples of disbelief.
- To learn who is a disbeliever.
- To learn 4 reasons that prevent a Muslim from becoming a disbeliever.
- To learn if a person can return to Islam after leaving it.

## Arabic Terms:

- *Imaan* - faith, belief or conviction.
- *Kufr* - disbelief.
- *Kafir* - (plural: *kuffar*) disbeliever.
- *Shahadah* - Testimony of Faith.
- *Shariah* - Islamic Law.
- *Shirk* - a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

## Definition of Sin & its Types

A sin is defined as an act of disobedience in which a person leaves Allah's command. A sinner contradicts *Shariah* by opposing a command of Allah given in the Quran or *Sunnah*. Scholars describe a sin with the image of "stepping out" of divine obedience by doing what is forbidden or leaving what is required. Islam teaches that man is not born in sin, rather he becomes sinful when he commits a sin.



Sins can be categorized into:

a) **Kufr** (disbelief): It takes a person outside of the fold of Islam and makes him a disbeliever. Examples of this sin will be clarified below, but it should be clear that *kufr* will take a person out of the fold of Islam when they are consciously aware of the nature and severity of the sin they are doing. In essence, *kufr* constitutes completely "stepping out" of Islam and divine obedience. A person who commits *kufr* is called a 'disbeliever' (Arabic: *kafir*) and he is no longer a Muslim. If he dies in that state, he will enter into Hell and stay there forever (9:84; 24:55). It should be noted that calling someone a *kafir* (disbeliever) is not to be done by the average individual; it is a ruling issued by Islamic scholars. If a Muslim sees another committing an act of *kufr* they are to give that person advice repetitively but the title 'disbeliever' should not be given to him.

It is important to note that despite stepping into disbelief, a person can re-enter Islam at any time *before* death.

b) **Major and minor sins:** The one who commits major and minor sins does not lose all their faith and is within the fold of Islam (49:6; 2:282). Such a person is a Muslim, but with damaged faith (Arabic: "*imaan*").

The remaining lesson will explain disbelief.

## Definition of Disbelief

"Disbelief" (Arabic: *kufr*) is defined as absence of faith (Arabic: *imaan*) by all Muslim scholars. It does not matter whether the person speaks of it or holds it in the heart.<sup>[1]</sup> In other words, 'disbelief' (Arabic: *kufr*) is any word, act, or belief that contradicts faith (Arabic: *imaan*).

## Examples of Disbelief

1. Committing *shirk*.
2. Hating or cursing God and the Quran.
3. Hating, cursing, abusing, or making fun of Prophet Muhammad even if a person is convinced of his truthfulness.
4. Saying Prophet Muhammad lied.

5. Knowing the Prophet conveyed the truth, but rejecting to follow his teachings.
6. Making fun of any teaching of Islam.
7. Prostrating to an idol.
8. Worshipping Prophet Muhammad the way Christians worship Jesus.

## Who is a Disbeliever, a *Kafir*?

A disbeliever is a person who disbelieves in the message of Prophet Muhammad. It is one who has not uttered the two testimonies, lacks the correct Islamic faith (*imaan*), or holds a belief, says a word, or does an act of disbelief.

There is an important point to be understood here. If a person who becomes a Muslim by uttering the Testimony of Faith (*shahadah*) holds a belief, says, or does what is considered *kufr*, he may not necessarily become a disbeliever. The reason is that after becoming a Muslim, there are certain obstacles that prevent a person from becoming a *kafir*.

## Reasons That Prevent a Person from Becoming a Disbeliever

A Muslim might fall into disbelief, but not become a disbeliever due to one of the following reasons:[\[2\]](#)

### 1. Ignorance

A convert, a Muslim who grew up in a remote area, or a Muslim who was raised in an irreligious environment may be ignorant of the basic beliefs, religious duties, and prohibitions of Islam. Such a person may not know, for example, that Islam prohibits homosexuality or requires prayers five times a day. These people may fall into disbelief, but will not become disbelievers because in the sight of Allah they may be excused due to their ignorance.

### 2. Mistake

A person may miss the mark and do something he never intended. He may simply make an unintentional, honest mistake. For example, if a convert to Islam believes that consuming alcohol is only forbidden at prayer times. From a textual perspective, consuming alcohol, while believing it to be lawful, is an act of disbelief, but this person would not become a disbeliever because of the honest mistake he committed.

### 3. Compulsion

A person may be forced to do or say what amounts to disbelief because of a direct threat to their life or limb or their loved ones. In any such situation the heart should

always be content with Islam, full of faith; thereafter, a person may say or do what is *kufr* (16:106).

#### 4. Misinterpretation

He may have some confusion and some misinterpretation that he adheres to, thinking that what he believes is actually part of Islam when it is not.

## Returning to Islam After Leaving It

A person who knowingly left the fold of Islam can become a Muslim again. His 'repentance' is to re-enter Islam and he does so by repeating the Testimony of Faith (*shahadah*).

If he left Islam for opposing an obligatory duty, then he must also acknowledge that duty. Let us say he used to deny the obligation of the five daily prayers. When he re-enters Islam, he must acknowledge that these prayers are required, otherwise, his repentance would not be accepted.

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Endnotes:

[1] *Majmu Fatawa li Ibn Taimiyya*, vol 20, p. 86

[2] *Nawaqidh al-Imaan al-I'tiqadiyya wa Dhawabit al-Takfir ind as-Salaf* by Dr. Muhammad al-Wuhaibi, vol. 1 p. 225 - vol.2 p. 36

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